

My Tamarack Experience

a client's story about *the rewards of recovery*



You graduated Tamarack's program over 4 ½ years ago; what does your life look like now?

Life is good today. I moved to Brandon in 2012. I am enrolled in my fourth and final year of a bachelor of science in psychiatric nursing. I am a full time student with two jobs: primarily as a mental health proctor in the community, as well as being employed as a casual psych nursing assistant (health care aide) at the Brandon Centre for Geriatric Psychiatry. My primary passion in life is powerlifting. I train and compete and have channeled that "addict energy" into something positive. I live in a house with four friends and rarely do I see a dull day.

Tell us about your journey from Tamarack to now - what were the ups and downs like and what were your challenges?

It has been an uphill journey, to say the least. One day at a time. When I got out of Tamarack, I had next to nothing. I was in debt without income, had less than a hand's count of people who cared about me in my personal life, and nothing to do except decide whether to binge watch professional wrestling or some television series. Still coming back physically from the side effects of drug abuse and unstable mental health, I spent a lot of time alone. Coping with life outside of the safety of rehab was tough. Facing the past and trying to figure out a future was daunting. The low point in my recovery came after my first "birthday". That 12-18 months clean mark was miserable because I stopped working the program for a while and [felt] isolated more than ever - but I didn't use.

The ups? Endless. Likely the highest point of my recovery was finishing step five. That was around my second "birthday". I used to spend my life obsessing about the past and afraid of the future. Overnight, I got rid of my baggage and fears and was instantly able to live in the moment. I lost the desire to use drugs sometime around my fourth month clean. I have finished three years of university with a good GPA. I lost 70lbs and got in shape, eventually beginning to train powerlifting. I got my first girlfriend. I learned how to feel! I quit smoking cigarettes. I learned how to socialize: I have built a new life and a massive social network. It's unreal to list all of those achievements in just a few words.

Could you have imagined (10 years ago for example) where you'd be now?

10 years ago, life was a lot different. I was a miserable teenager on the downward spiral at the time. I probably had delusional dreams of being a rock star. Five years ago, almost to the day, I overdosed and was nearing "bottom". I truly did not think I would live to see my 21st birthday. I will celebrate 5 years clean on December 4th.



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Were there times when you were working hard but struggled to see the fruits of your labour?

Early recovery is frustrating, to say the least. I could give you tons of examples, but the point I want to make is this – I progressively worked through literally all of my pre-recovery issues and have survived all problems as they have arisen since – simply because I didn't use. I truly believe that I can do anything, within reason, as long as I stay clean.

What kept you going?

"With life, there is hope." Rebounding from my bottom taught me that at the very least, I wanted to live. From there, it was up to me to do what it took to find some semblance of happiness. Faith that one day it would all work out. My higher power is recovery. Every step worked is another spiritual tumour removed. I've seen recovery work time and time again for those who want it. I know life will work out because I have seen it work out. Acknowledging progress, staying introspective and accountable, and believing relapse is death is my motivation. At my most miserable, I never lost this "learned faith".

How important is it for people in recovery to stop to acknowledge and celebrate?

It is imperative for serenity and maintaining a positive outlook, in my opinion. When my molehill issues seem like mountains, I consider when the last time I went to a meeting was – that's typically the real issue at hand. Meetings are harsh reminders of what life was like before and where it could easily end up again, and I am most serene when attending meetings regularly. Active recovery allows me to see how good I have it. Meetings fuel gratitude, for me at least. Being mindful of successes is important for confidence. Celebrating, I have learned, is crucial not for the self but to show others what is possible. Recovery celebrations are inspirational. When someone three days, three weeks, three months fresh sees someone take a year or twenty clean, they have proof that it can get better. I may not be here today if I hadn't seen those who came before me celebrate their successes.

How much of an impact do you feel that what you learned at Tamarack has been to who you are, and where you are, today?

Getting into recovery and four weeks of AFM was an introduction, but Tamarack made me begin to deal with my issues. Counselling in Tamarack was the first time I ever let people behind my walls. Acute therapy is different than an Anonymous program, and significantly more useful than the "starter pack" that shorter programs offer. Whenever I speak about Tamarack, I say "Tamarack saved my life". It isn't that simple, but two months of intense rehabilitation with an outstanding staff was paramount for everything that came after it. Aftercare is a great support and anchor – it doesn't stop at the sixty day mark. I wish I used more of the post-intake services, actually. It is simply a privilege to go through Tamarack. It is unfortunate that not everyone can enroll in such a program, but I believe relapse rates would be much smaller if everyone could.



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What is your approach and attitude towards life, and how much did Tamarack play into that?

My best days are when I take opportunities as they are presented rather than saying no for whatever reason. I don't want to stagnate; I want to continue to get stronger holistically. I try not to restrict myself and plan as little as responsibly possible, living life not just day to day, but moment to moment. I rarely think about the past anymore and sometime around turning 25 years old, my "existential crisis" ended – the future is friendly. If you've ever seen the movie "Yes Man", my attitude is a tamer version of that. If there's no good reason to say no to something, I try not to turn down opportunities. In hindsight, Tamarack taught me to cope with the past and present, and gave me the skills to plan without fixating on the future. Tamarack instilled optimism in me. I found my higher power in Tamarack – and that's priceless.



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